



- Read introductory information.
- Complete theme questions.
- Type according to class format.
- Title and number responses (eg. Theme of Love).
- Complete questions at the end of the packet.

Anthem by Ayn Rand

Imagine yourself in a future where individuality has been eliminated. Every human being exists only to serve the greater collective of mankind: the "great WE." You have no say over how you live, who you spend time with, what you study, or what job you get. You can't smile or laugh without reason. Every hour of the day is scheduled, managed, and policed by society. You're never allowed to be alone. And you're never, ever allowed to use the word "I," which means that you're always stuck using the royal "we."

Yes, this is the world you'll find yourself in if you read *Anthem*. Does it sound like a nightmare? It's meant to be. But the frightening thing is that, according to Ayn Rand, we're getting closer to that world every day.

Intrigued? Excited? Concerned? All of the above? Then check out *Anthem*, and find out why Ayn Rand remains one of the most controversial authors read today.

There's also a practical side to all of this, too. At some point

in your life we can almost guarantee you're going to run into someone who calls himself or herself an "Objectivist." (If you haven't heard the word before, "Objectivism" is the name for Ayn Rand's philosophy). You might have already. You might be an Objectivist yourself, and might want to have more exposure to the philosophy.

Regardless of how you feel about Rand's philosophy, her books really are popular. So don't you want to see what all the fuss is about for yourself? If you do, then we recommend *Anthem* as a good place to start.

Anthem Theme of Philosophical Viewpoints

When she wrote *Anthem*, Ayn Rand hadn't yet fully developed the distinctive philosophy of Objectivism for which she later became known. Many of the essentials, however, are already at play in the novella, especially the central idea of *egoism*, the belief that every individual should freely pursue his or her own personal happiness without any sense of being obligated to other human beings. Rand sees the human individual as the highest, most sacred being in the universe. All of these ideas and more are brought out in the last pages of *Anthem* (a literal anthem to the human ego), which read like an egoist manifesto.

Questions About Philosophical Viewpoints

1. How would you define egoism, as Equality 7-2521 outlines it in *Anthem*? How would you define its opposite, collectivism?
2. Why, according to Equality 7-2521, do individuals owe nothing to other individuals?
3. What does Equality mean when he says, "I am the meaning"?
4. Is Equality 7-2521 a true egoist? Why or why not?

Anthem Theme of Freedom and Confinement

Ayn Rand believed a high degree of freedom to be utterly necessary for any individual who wanted to be genuinely happy, and considered the defense of individual freedom morally essential. She also saw freedom as constantly under threat from collectivism, which tries to promote individuals serving their society or the greater good. In *Anthem*, Rand depicts a nightmarish society in which collectivism has won completely and real freedom no longer exists. Individuals are not allowed to do anything without the explicit permission of society, and they're especially forbidden from ever being alone. The struggles of the main character against the bonds of society, and his eventual escape from them, form the plot of the book.

Questions About Freedom and Confinement

1. What are the principle ways in which Equality 7-2521's freedom is restricted in *Anthem*?
2. Can you identify a single moment at which he is liberated?
3. According to Equality 7-2521, what is freedom? Why does he define it the way he does? Do you agree with his definition?
4. What is the relationship between freedom and happiness in *Anthem*?
5. Why would anyone give up their freedom, according to Equality 7-2521? Do you agree with him?

Anthem Theme of Identity

In the world Ayn Rand depicts in *Anthem*, individuals have no identity of their own. They exist only for the sake of the community. There is no "I" (the word literally doesn't exist), but only "the great WE." Anything that might allow individuals to develop their own identity – whether it be a name, a mirror, or the first-person singular – is suppressed. The story's plot follows the main character, Equality 7-2521, as he slowly discovers his own identity as an individual. Gradually he moves away from thinking himself as a member of the "we" to thinking of himself as an "I" and valuing his own uniqueness.

Questions About Identity

1. Does Equality 7-2521 have any sense of individual identity when *Anthem* begins? How can you tell?
2. What steps does the society in *Anthem* take to prevent individuals from acquiring a sense of individual identity? Why does it take the steps it does?
3. Do any other characters besides Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000 show signs of individual identity? Do you think most members of the society have any sense of it?
4. Trace the progress of Equality 7-2521's development of identity in *Anthem*. At what moment would you say he comes to a clear sense of himself as an individual?



Anthem Theme of Society and Class

Anthem takes the classic idea of the clash between an individual and his society to a new extreme. The society in this novella controls every aspect of its members' lives, from their daily schedules to their sexual partners to when they're allowed to smile. Individuals are told they exist only for the sake of serving society, and have no other purpose. It's society which chooses what they'll do with their lives, assigning them permanent life careers called "Mandates" which rigidly determine not only their occupation but also with whom they'll live and socialize. The novella's main character, Equality 7-2521, finds himself in a constant struggle with the attempts of his society to force his individuality into a mold it just won't fit.

Questions About Society and Class

1. What would you say is the main value of the society depicted in *Anthem*?
2. What holds together the society portrayed in *Anthem*? Why do people follow its rules? How easily would it fall apart?
3. How many of the people who belong to the collectivistic society depicted in *Anthem* genuinely want to live in it? Most of them, few of them, all of them, or none of them? Why might some people want to live in it and not others?
4. Why do you think the people in Equality 7-2521's society live only forty years?

Anthem Theme of Happiness

According to Ayn Rand, individual happiness is the highest good in life. No individual has any higher – or more moral – reason for living than their own happiness. The plot of *Anthem* follows the main character, Equality 7-2521, as he gradually comes to this realization. To do so, however, he must liberate himself from the influences of his collectivist society. That society teaches all of its members that there is no reason for living, and no way to be happy besides toiling for one's fellow men. Equality 7-2521 originally believes in this himself. But as he (illegally) falls in love with a woman and (illegally) starts to pursue his own real passion (science) in secret, he discovers happiness. He comes to recognize that he is only happy when he acts for himself, and no one else.

Questions About Happiness

1. What does Equality 7-2521 think makes him happy at the beginning of *Anthem*? What are the things that actually make him happy?
2. Is Equality 7-2521 ever genuinely happy before he meets Liberty 5-3000? What makes you think so?
3. What is the attitude Equality 7-2521's society takes toward happiness? Does it value the happiness of individuals? Of the community?
4. Is his own happiness Equality 7-2521's only goal in life? Is it his primary goal? Why?



Anthem Theme of Science

The main character of *Anthem*, Equality 7-2521 is a scientist by nature – a scientific genius. More than anything else, he wants to learn about the way the world is, and believes knowledge to be good for its own sake. Unfortunately, he's born into a collectivist society that suppresses his talent for science, because it threatens to make him superior to others. In secret, Equality 7-2521 starts to illegally conduct scientific research, and discovers for himself secrets that his primitive society has never dreamed of. Equality 7-2521's illegal research ironically enables him to produce an invention far more beneficial to the greater good than anything his society has invented. At stake in the conflict between Equality 7-2521 and his society is the status of truth itself, and the importance of science for improving the lot of mankind.

Questions About Science

1. Why does Equality 7-2521 pursue science so passionately? Do his motives change throughout *Anthem*? Is there a conflict between them?
2. Why is Equality 7-2521 able to advance so much further in science than the Scholars of his society?
3. What, according to Collective 0-0009, is the purpose of science? According to Equality 7-2521?
4. Why does Collective 0-0009 reject Equality's invention?

Anthem Theme of Love

In the controlled society depicted in *Anthem*, love between two people is illegal. Two people in love are tempted to care more for their lover than they are for their "fellow man." When the main character, Equality 7-2521, finds himself in love with a woman, Liberty 5-3000, he first doesn't know quite what to do. Yet in the end, his love for Liberty 5-3000 does overpower all of his other feelings, and pushes him towards rejecting all that his society has taught him. The same thing happens to Liberty 5-3000, too, who eventually chooses to place her love for Equality 7-2521 above everything else. There's something strange about Liberty 5-3000's love for Equality 7-2521 though; sometimes it looks more like worship and submission than love between equal partners.

Questions About Love

1. Why does Equality 7-2521 fall in love with Liberty 5-3000? Why does she fall in love with him?
2. How does Equality 7-2521's experience of love change him? Does it?
3. Is there a conflict between Equality 7-2521's love for Liberty 5-3000 and his passion for science? Why?
4. Do Liberty 5-3000 and Equality 7-2521 have a healthy relationship? Why or why not?

Anthem Theme of Loyalty

In *Anthem*, every member of society is expected to live and work only for the "great WE," the brotherhood of all men. Every person is supposed to be equally important. No one is allowed to commit the Transgression of Preference – caring more for one person than another. The characters in *Anthem* find themselves struggling against this oppressive social rule as they develop relationships of friendship and love, both of which are illegal according to their society. The main character also starts to discover a growing sense of loyalty to himself, the greatest transgression of all, according to his society. Yet the sense of loyalty he seems to feel for humankind, as opposed to the society and laws that is hard for him to shake.

Questions About Loyalty

1. To whom or what is Equality 7-2521 most loyal at the beginning of *Anthem*?
2. What steps does the society in *Anthem* take to ensure the loyalty of its members?
3. At what point in *Anthem* does Equality 7-2521 lose his sense of loyalty to his society? Why?
4. Why does Equality 7-2521 feel drawn to liberate members of his former society once he's freed himself from it?

You'll notice something about almost all of the admirable characters in *Anthem*: they're young, beautiful, brave, strong, smart, and capable. The descriptions of their bodies are practically interchangeable, in fact. And they form quite a contrast with the rest of their fellow men, who are weak, fearful, and compliant with the society. In *Anthem*, Ayn Rand illustrates the split she saw in human society between the mediocre masses and the exceptional few. The main character of the book is an idealized member of this exceptional few. The brilliance of his individual mind makes him more powerful than all the combined forces of his society.

Questions About Strength and Skill

1. Does Equality 7-2521 have any weaknesses? Does Liberty 5-3000?
2. What is the connection between strength and goodness in *Anthem*? Are they the same thing?
3. In what way is the word "We" a "weapon of the weak"?
4. Does having all of the "strong" characters in *Anthem* resemble each other strengthen the novella, or detract from it?

General Questions

1. Are the characters in *Anthem* too idealized to be believable? Can you relate to any of them?
2. What do you think ultimately drives Equality 7-2521? What is most important to him? Is it his own happiness, as he says it is?
3. *Anthem* was originally rejected for publication by the editors at McMillan Press because they said Rand "failed to understand socialism." Do you agree with them, or disagree? Why?
4. Is Ayn Rand's depiction of "collectivism" too satirical or absurd to be threatening? Is it an effective critique?
5. Does the philosophical nature of *Anthem* undermine or strengthen it as a work of literature? Is it possible to appreciate *Anthem* as a work of literature without agreeing with it as a work of philosophy?
6. Is *Anthem* convincing in its attempt to present the human ego as an object worthy of reverence?
7. Is there an "argument" for egoism in *Anthem*? And do you yourself find the egoism Equality 7-2521 adopts compelling? Why or why not?
8. Is Randian egoism the same as what we ordinarily call "selfishness," or is it something different? Is Equality 7-2521 a selfish character?
9. Does Ayn Rand promote any other values in *Anthem* besides egoism? Is it possible to agree with some of its moral message while rejecting the egoism?
10. Does one have to choose between "egoism" and "collectivism," as Ayn Rand seems to suggest? Or are there positions in between those two? What would they look like?
11. Is *Anthem* still relevant today? Why or why not?

